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Testimony

Statement
of
Joseph E. Schmitz
Inspector General
of the
Department of Defense
to the
Subcommittee on National Security,
Veterans Affairs, and International Relations
House Government Reform Committee
on
Chemical and Biological Equipment:
Preparing for the Toxic Battlefield

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your Committee today and address your questions regarding the status of individual protective equipment intended to protect our Armed Forces from chemical and biological attack. I share your concerns with respect to the Department's inventories, quality controls, and serviceability of individual protective equipment. In our open session I want to present our observations related to the need for an inventory management tool at the unit level that contains the essential elements needed for chemical and biological defense materiel, improvements in readiness reporting, training challenges, and defective chemical and biological defense equipment that is still being identified in the inventory. The best chemical and biological defense materiels cannot protect the forces if they are not adequately maintained, stored, or if the forces are not sufficiently trained in how to maintain and use the equipment. Much has changed in the Department and the world since 1994 when we began focusing on chemical and biological individual protective equipment.

The Department has a very comprehensive program to provide world-class chemical and biological defense capabilities. These capabilities allow the Armed Forces of the United States to survive and successfully complete their operational missions across the spectrum of conflicts. The April 2002 Annual Report to Congress on the Department's Chemical and Biological Defense Program shows the quality of the Department's research, development, management, equipment, and training initiatives. The overall program is an example of how the Department can aggressively react to ensure that the military members are protected against the growing challenges of chemical and biological attacks. The research and development programs are extremely impressive and have enabled the Department to develop some of the best individual protective equipment in the world.

The events of the past year have demonstrated that the threats facing the United States and its Armed Forces can be diverse and asymmetrical as well as conventional in nature. The United States has well-defined national security interests in regions where known or suspected chemical and biological weapons programs are conducted by countries of concern. For these reasons, our Armed Forces must be prepared to execute their missions in all types of environments, including those that are chemically and biologically contaminated. The Department must maintain an active, viable chemical and biological defense program for the protection of its forces. In his annual report to the President and Congress, the Secretary stated that "the proliferation of NBC [Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical] technology, materiel, and expertise has provided potential adversaries with the means to challenge directly the safety and security of the United States and its allies and friends."

As the result of various reviews, my office has made efforts to address the availability and serviceability of the chemical and biological defense materiel issued to the Armed Forces. Since the last appearance before this Subcommittee in June 2000, the Office of the Inspector General has continued its efforts to ensure that the chemical and biological defense equipment issued to the Armed Forces has been adequately maintained and stored, and that all personnel requiring chemical and biological defense equipment have it and are properly trained to use it. Two audits we have conducted address issues your invitation letter specifically requested me to discuss. Because the results of the two audits are classified, I will discuss them in closed session.

Units Visited

Since February 2000, we have visited 287 units in 31 states, 1 U.S. territory, and 9 countries under the command of 2 unified commands, 8 active duty Component commands, 4 Reserve Component commands, and the Army and Air National Guard to review their management of chemical and biological defense resources. The results of our work is based on what we have seen in the military units most likely to encounter a chemical and biological attack. The Services have each undertaken several efforts to improve the oversight of chemical and biological defense equipment. The problems that we identified in those unit visits can be corrected; the issues are not insurmountable. Solving the problems will require a concerted effort at all levels of command in each of the Services and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Some commands, such as the U.S. Naval Forces, Central Command, have established vigorous programs to protect personnel from chemical and biological weapons. Other organizations have less robust programs that need to be improved. I will discuss those programs in greater detail later in closed session.

Inventory Management

Limited visibility of chemical and biological defense items as assets remains a problem at the installation or user level because of the lack of automated inventory tracking systems at that level. Each of the Services maintains their own inventory management tool. These tools are often augmented at the local installation level with other tools, usually locally developed or procured, that provide a detailed view of the stocks of chemical and biological defense equipment. The tools are systems that should contain, at a minimum, information such as stock number, size, contract number, lot number, date of manufacture, date of expiration, date of inspection, the individual issued the item, and any service bulletins or recall notices.

There should not be a need to develop inventory management tools at the installation level. For example, one Navy activity reported to us that they spent

\$15,000 to develop an Excel spreadsheet, while another Navy activity identified an expenditure of roughly \$100,000 to develop and field their chemical and biological defense equipment inventory tool. Although these expenditures might seem small on an individual basis, the fact that commanders identified a need to develop their own tools should highlight the need for a Department-wide standardized inventory tool.

The Department has worked to standardize other issues related to chemical and biological defense, and it can do so here as well. For example, the Services are moving to common masks, one for aircrew personnel and one for ground personnel. This standardization will greatly enhance not only the protection of the individual service members but also interoperability and joint warfighting.

This example demonstrates that when needed, the Department can work to unify areas that benefit all, and standardizing an automated inventory management tool would provide Department-wide benefits. This would not even require developing a new inventory tool because some of the tools already in use could be adapted by the other Services. For example, the Mobility Inventory and Control Accountability System currently used throughout the Air Force provides a level of detail that units in each of the Services have identified would aid them in managing their inventories. This system is used to maintain control of inventory and can be used to identify materiels on hand that have been flagged for inspection because of service notices or product recalls, such as the one for defective overgarments. The system also assists in managing on-hand stocks with an identified shelf-life by tracking lot numbers or dates of manufacture.

The question then becomes one of, who should be the one to enforce standardization? We believe that the Office of the Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Chemical and Biological Defense should provide the oversight Department-wide and should be responsible for initiatives such as this. We have recommended that the Deputy Assistant develop and field a DoD-standardized inventory management system for all items of chemical and biological defense. In response to our recommendation, the Deputy Assistant agreed that the Services and the Defense Logistics Agency have numerous inventory management systems with limited ability to share information. The Deputy Assistant pointed out that DoD has established a single focal point for gathering and disseminating data for the new Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology (JSLIST) ensembles and that the Defense Logistics Agency is actively involved in replacing legacy systems with one that will interface with the Services' systems beginning in 2005.

We have conveyed to the Deputy Assistant that 2005 is too long to wait. A standard inventory tool at the installation level for chemical and biological defense equipment is needed now for the units to effectively manage their equipment.

Readiness Reporting

The Army can enhance the preparedness of our forces relative to chemical and biological defense through an improved unit readiness reporting system. The Army attempted to provide better information on chemical and biological defense preparedness when they revised their readiness reporting instruction in November 2001, but additional improvements can still be made. As a result of our work with the Army National Guard and Army Reserve, we recommended that the Army revise their instruction for reporting readiness and include reporting of chemical and biological defense materiels for all Army units. The Army agreed to our recommendation. A unit's chemical and biological defense readiness does not affect its overall readiness rating because it is not a required factor in determining that rating. As a result of our work overseas, we recommended that the Army include the chemical and biological defense readiness of a unit in determining the readiness rating of the unit. We are awaiting comments from the Army. Mandatory inclusion of a unit's chemical and biological defense preparedness in the calculation of a unit's readiness rating would provide commanders at all levels with a more comprehensive level of their actual readiness.

Training

Improved reporting of chemical and biological defense readiness will aid in creating a climate at all Army levels where training and equipping forces for chemical and biological defense receive higher levels of attention and resources. I will go into greater detail on the issues we identified in the units we visited in my testimony for the closed session. For this session, I would like to state that each of the Services has a comprehensive training program that they believe will prepare their personnel to survive and operate in a chemically or biologically contaminated environment. I believe that they have put in place the foundation on which programs can be built that will provide for the protection and survivability of their personnel. The Marine Corps and Air Force training were more robust than the Army and Navy programs.

Each of the Services ensures that all personnel receive chemical and biological defense training when they enter the Service. Any subsequent training is based on the Service and the mission of the unit that the personnel are assigned to. The Army has established a policy that allows the local commanders the flexibility to determine their training frequency. Although this provides commanders with the flexibility they require, the result is that some units had limited training or did not train at all. For example, one Army National Guard Air Defense Artillery unit we visited had limited training on chemical and biological defense equipment. When an Army team assessed chemical and biological defense training for a unit of 86 personnel, the team only assessed 2 personnel and only on 1 of 6 chemical and

biological defense skills. This provides an incomplete picture of the readiness of the unit to operate and survive in a contaminated environment. As a result of our recommendations, the Army has agreed to enhance training for chemical and biological defense.

We have also recommended that the Navy ensure compliance with its existing guidance for chemical and biological defense training. In response, the Navy is updating its Navy Technical Training Plan to contain a new chemical and biological defense reporting field that includes chemical and biological defense equipment and training standards. These are conditions that can be corrected by having a directed, forward-leaning program that will provide for the protection of all Service members.

Management Actions Taken

I would like to take this opportunity to update some of the actions that the Department has undertaken since our last appearance before this Subcommittee in June 2000. Improvements have occurred in many areas, yet areas of concern still exist. One of the topics previously discussed at length before this Committee was the presence of defective battle dress overgarments in the DoD inventory. As you recall, these overgarments were manufactured by the Isratex Corporation and sold to the Department even though they were defective. Another issue before this Committee was the inaccuracy of inventory records for chemical suits. One of our earlier audit reports identified the inaccuracy of inventory records for chemical battle dress overgarments at the Defense Depot at Albany, Georgia. As of October 12, 2000, the overgarments had been inventoried, the inventory records corrected, and messages issued about the defective overgarments.

In October 2001 we requested the Defense Logistics Agency to provide an update of their actions to locate the approximately 250,000 defective Isratex overgarments that DoD could not account for. The Defense Logistics Agency reported to us that they believed that the 250,000 unaccounted-for overgarments were issued, worn, and disposed of. The Defense Logistics Agency also stated that based on repeated messages and advisories, and through incentives to their customers, the Defense Logistics Agency believed that any remaining overgarments were identified and pulled out of serviceable inventories. The Department has worked vigorously to identify and segregate the defective overgarments; however, not all units have received this information from their higher headquarters. Once segregated, the defective overgarments were to be used solely for training. As recently as April 2002, we continued to identify units that had not segregated those defective overgarments in their inventories. It is important to note that when the defective overgarments are identified, the Services and the Defense Logistics Agency have taken quick corrective action to remove the defective items and to provide the units with serviceable replacements.

Summary

Standardizing and improving installation level logistics tools, readiness reporting, and training are positive steps needed to help ensure that our Service members are adequately prepared for the potential horrors of chemical and biological attacks. Chemical and biological defense has been a primary focus of the Inspector General of the Department of Defense audits over the past few years. Given the importance of fully addressing the management challenges in this difficult area, we have attempted to maintain continuous coverage despite severe resource constraints and other requirements. Currently we are auditing the maintenance of individual protective equipment in the U.S. Pacific Command, the security over select biological agents, emergency preparedness of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the management of decontamination resources.

Thank you for considering the views of the Office of the Inspector General on these critical issues. This concludes my testimony.